

THE CHANCES OF A MAO-STALIN RIFT

Will China's Communists Take the Tito Road?

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MUCH has been said and written during the past year about the possibility of a falling out between Moscow and Peking. In some English left-wing circles the expectation of a conflict between the two leading Communist regimes has become the keystone of a complete political theory, while, with certain American groups, the denial of any differences between Russian and Chinese Communism that could conceivably lead to conflict is an article of faith.

If one examines the matter more closely, at least one element in this debate can be cleared up at the outset. Those who believe in the possibility of a clash between Moscow and Peking are thinking primarily of national rivalries or conflicts of national interest of basically the same type as we find in the non-Communist world. Such an approach poses the question incorrectly: for today national rivalries, even outside the Communist sphere, no longer lead to international conflicts in the grand style: it is pure illusion, for example, to

think that the great struggle between the United States and Russia has anything to do with a conflict of national interests in 19th-century terms, as did, for example, the struggle between England and Germany before the First World War. So those who deny the possibility of a break between Russia and China based on national interests are, it seems to me, right: Stalin and Mao, in their relations with the West, are inseparably bound together by a common political credo, and this common credo overrides whatever secondary conflicts may exist between them.

However, the fact that in the face of "capitalist imperialism" differences between the national interests of Russia and China can be relatively easily adjusted by their Communist rulers does not preclude the possibility of a serious break between Russia and China: it means rather that we must look for it elsewhere. An intelligent American writer, Benjamin Schwartz, has recently suggested where we must look. In *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Harvard University Press), he advances the thesis that Chinese Communism differs fundamentally from Russian Communism in that it is based on the peasantry rather than the proletariat. This approach comes closer to the problem in that, for the source of possible tensions within world Communism, it focuses on differences in the character of the two Communist parties. Every political and social order has its special type of international relationships and conflicts. In the Middle Ages, the principal conflicts were concerned with status and rank in feudal society. In modern times, they have related to the power of national states and the struggle for natural resources. In the Communist world, the party is the

PERHAPS nothing so divides the free nations today as their varying estimates of Chinese Communism. One section of public opinion believes the Chinese Communists are as totally dependent on Moscow as those of any Cominform affiliate; another sees the possibility of China's becoming a second Yugoslavia. Here FRANZ BORKENAU, one of the world's leading authorities on contemporary Communism, discusses some little known material on Mao Tse-tung's past and the history of the Chinese Communist party generally, which may serve to illuminate this riddle. Mr. Borkenau is the author of a history of the Communist International, and of many other books. His last article in COMMENTARY was "How Deal With Franco?" in the December 1951 issue. His present article has been translated from German by Maurice J. Goldbloom.

center of all things, and conflicts relate to the means by which it is held together and to the nature and extent of the area within which it can compel men to accept the strict letter of its doctrine. From this it follows that a Chinese deviation from Russian Communism in respect to social basis and "ideology" would be bound to lead to a life and death struggle—so Schwartz suggests.

But in my opinion Schwartz makes the mistake of overestimating the importance of formal Marxist doctrine in understanding the actual composition of contemporary Communist parties. According to Marx, the party of socialism had to have a proletarian class character, and this is certainly not true of Chinese Communism. But is it any truer of Russian Communism, an organization of intellectual professional revolutionaries which transformed itself into a new ruling class? Is it not rather true that in contemporary Communism—Russian, Chinese, or any other sort—Marx's emphasis on the proletariat is only a historical reminiscence, which Stalin himself, it now seems, is abandoning? An organization of professional revolutionaries, whether as a fighting party or a governing apparatus, by its very nature is independent of special interest groups. It is above them all—workers, peasants, businessmen or what-have-you—devoting itself to its vision, formulated quite apart from any interest group: it is just this that constitutes its "totalitarian" character.

Hence it hardly matters that Chinese Communism is alienated from the proletariat and based on the peasantry. If Chinese Communists were indeed nothing but an executive organ of peasant interests, and incapable of rising above the limits of peasant ideas, while the Russian Communist party held the same relation to the proletariat, then we would have an important basis for conflict between the two parties. But certainly this is not the case. Like every other Communist movement, Chinese Communism sought its mass base wherever it could be found, in this case among the peasants. But it never lost sight of the fact

that this was a transitional stage, a problem of tactics, and that a Communist society had to be based on large-scale industry. It is today engaged in rapidly strengthening its base in the big cities, and in shifting its strength from the country. In any case, however, it is a matter of where its cadres are to be recruited, not a matter of which interest group is to be dominant. On this point, there is no basic and permanent difference between Chinese and Russian Communism.

NEVERTHELESS Schwartz is on the right path in his search for differences in the party structure of the two movements. And his analysis—which unfortunately only covers the period up to 1932—does point to one of the most important factors. This is that Mao has been quite independent of Moscow throughout his entire career. This is the point on which Mao's career resembles Tito's, as has often been pointed out; actually, Tito had a career first as a Comintern functionary in Spain and then as the Moscow-installed leader of the Yugoslav party. Mao on the other hand, although of course a loyal party member, was never particularly close to Moscow. Schwartz has dug up every detail on this point and has thus brought to light one of Moscow's most difficult problems. The world Communist movement depends on strict discipline from above; determination of all national leaders must be under the control of the highest center. Any party independent enough to select its own leader has generally been cast straightaway into the outer darkness. But such independence is just what happened in the largest and most important non-Russian Communist movement, and the leader's belated formal investiture by Moscow only underscores this fact. It is pregnant with the most serious consequences for world Communism, as we shall show.

BEFORE Mao became chairman of the Chinese Politburo, four other party leaderships had preceded him. Schwartz, like other writers on Chinese Communism, fails to recognize the essential character of these

leaderships and of their rise and fall. The eyes of students of Chinese Communism are fixed too exclusively on China, and too little on Moscow. These four leaders of the early period were not the products of Chinese conditions. They were raised up and cast down by Moscow alone, in accordance with the tactical principles dominant there at a particular moment. The founder of the party, Chen Tu-hsiu, represented the "United Front" policy introduced by Karl Radek in 1921. In Europe, this meant cooperation between the Communists and the left wing of Social Democracy; in China, cooperation with the Kuomintang. This leadership fell at the end of 1927, but not because it had, at Stalin's orders, led the party into catastrophic defeats. No Communist party leadership has ever fallen as the result of a defeat, however severe, if its loyalties satisfied the men who were at the moment victorious in the Russian internal factional struggle. It fell because in the middle of 1927 Stalin began to prepare for his break with the right wing of the party, led by Bukharin and Rykov, and accordingly replaced "right" leadership with "left" leadership through the Comintern. This "turn" led to a sort of "transitional regime" in the Chinese Communist party. This was followed—again precisely paralleling similar shifts throughout the Communist world—by the installation of the left extremist Li Li-san as leader of the party. Little attention has been paid to the fact that all these left extremists who were put in the top positions in 1929—like Heinz Neumann in Germany, Barbé in France, and Guttman in Czechoslovakia—were removed in 1931. Li Li-san suffered the same fate, and historians have given themselves unnecessary trouble in seeking for special "Chinese" reasons for his removal. In his place there appeared, as everywhere else, a group of leaders who were somewhat more moderate, but who were above all else directly under Moscow's thumb. Their principal representative was Wan Min.

Up to this point the history of the Chinese Communist party, notwithstanding all the

dramatic crises of the Chinese Revolution, was a mechanical copy of the Moscow "general line." But at this point the chain suddenly breaks. The Wan Min Central Committee disintegrated under the pressure of persecution and its survivors fled into the interior, to the soviet district which had meanwhile been established in the mountains of Southern Kiangsi by Mao Tse-tung, Chu-teh, and their associates. And there Mao took over the leadership of the Chinese Communist party. The seats of the Central Committee and the Politburo were transferred from Shanghai to these isolated mountains; and the Comintern had no choice but to validate retroactively the removal of its representatives and the election of new leaders completely cut off from its control by geography. It all took place in the best tradition of Chinese courtesy, but it was a revolt against Moscow that went unpunished, and so was a historical turning point.

A whole array of factors obviously worked together to make all this possible. Most important, perhaps, was the growing indifference of Stalin and his circle to the Comintern, which characterized this phase and especially the period of the first Five Year Plan. (But this tendency was rapidly reversed after 1934.) Second perhaps was Stalin's wholesome dread of Chinese affairs; he had burnt his fingers there very badly in 1927-28, and what had happened since had in no way improved the situation of the Chinese Communists. A third factor was the proven incompetence of Wan Min. If as a result of all this the Chinese Communist party dissolved into nothingness—what did it matter? There is documentary proof that it took at least two years before Stalin even learned of the existence of Chinese soviets. No one, least of all Stalin, expected that Mao would ever again emerge from his mountain refuge.

STALIN's indifference suited Mao's diplomacy, which had a true Chinese deviousness as different as could be from the dogmatic obstinacy of European Communism. Mao's strength lay in the fact that

he strictly abstained from the wild factional struggles which had unseated one leadership after another. Occasionally he strove to cushion the effects of these struggles in his native Hunan, which did not make him popular with the heads of the party. But when he took to the mountains in 1928, it was a step which was in full accord with the party line and gave rise to no suspicion of heresy. For "armed uprising" was the slogan of the hour. He held out while other leaders, more closely linked with the party leadership, threw their strength away in senseless offensives, and his rocky stronghold steadily increased in importance. The Shanghai party leadership betrayed no longing for the hunger and rarefied air of Tinkanshan, while he never failed in supplying the necessary declaration of fidelity.

So he was left in peace; and as leader of the last surviving splinter of the party, he finally came to head it. With this, he for the first time went beyond the bounds of loyal phrases and began to expand his own power. There can be no doubt that he was at that time already determined to be and to remain party leader. That he thought in terms of a conflict with Moscow is most improbable. Moscow heard as little from him as he heard from Moscow. The decision in favor of the "Long March" to the North was made by Mao himself and only formally ratified by Moscow.

In the North, in the Yen-an district, his old opponents eagerly availed themselves of the opportunity for contacts with Moscow, and Mao had to entrust Wan Min and others with important party posts. But events were on Mao's side, for Moscow needed him urgently for the united front with Chiang Kai-shek against the Japanese: men like Wan Min or Li Li-san were incapable of carrying out such a maneuver. For Stalin, Mao Tse-tung was the instrument which could embroil the Japanese in China by forcing Chiang Kai-shek into an actively anti-Japanese policy. Thus Mao suddenly became a key piece on the Russian chessboard.

Now he sat firm in the saddle, no longer because his opponents were geographically unable to get at him, but because he had the strongest conceivable support. In 1937 his power within the party was at the zenith.

And then, there came the final *coup de théâtre*. When the outbreak of the Second World War reduced Russia's freedom of action, Mao Tse-tung threw Wan Min and all his "Muscovites" out of the party leadership. And in June 1941, a few weeks before the outbreak of the Russian war, he initiated the *cheng-feng*, or "rectification," campaign. What was to be "rectified"? The internal party regime, and that in a sense directly opposed to the point of view dominant in Moscow. It is this episode, scarcely known even today, which should be the point of reference of any investigation into the relationship between Moscow and Peking.

IT MUST be remembered that in Russia 1937-38 was the year of the great *chistka*, the terrible mass purge. It raged among the Chinese in Moscow as among the other foreigners there, but it did not affect the party organization in Yen-an. Mao was left in peace because of his indispensability to Russian foreign policy, but he could not have the slightest shadow of a doubt that he also was marked for the proscription which had befallen the leaders of the Baltic, Polish, Hungarian, Yugoslav, and many other parties. He was a member of that Communist old guard which was at that time being liquidated everywhere (except in the French and English sectors of the world Communist movement, where it was similarly indispensable for reasons of foreign policy). But in addition, he had reached the top independently of the Russian party and police apparatus. Under such circumstances a European would probably have rebelled against Moscow and would have met disaster in the process. Mao showed his farsightedness when he substituted the *cheng-feng* for open rebellion.

The *cheng-feng* campaign dealt chiefly with the methods of internal party discus-

sion. Chinese observers are agreed that the campaign was aimed directly at the Li Li-san and Wan Min groups—i.e., against Moscow's representatives in China—and their methods. The campaign sharply condemned the mixing of personal and political questions and threatened with the severest penalties those who could be shown to have denounced others from personal motives. It prohibited expulsion and police persecution because of purely tactical differences, and it ordered that internal party discussion be directed against "deviations" and not against the individuals who represented them. It may be objected that in the history of the world Communist movement there has not been any shortage of pious wishes and resolutions preaching peace. The proof of the good faith of this campaign is that in sharp contrast to the Russian Politburo and the Politburos of all the satellite states, the Chinese Politburo has never been purged. Even more decisive, the secret police have never played a role in the disputes within the Chinese leadership even distantly resembling that of the Russian secret police. In other words, the party of Mao Tse-tung, while it is indeed a totalitarian and therefore also terroristic party in relation to its social and political opponents and the general population, is no Stalinist party in the relationship of its leaders to the membership and to each other. This difference in internal party structure could only be eliminated if Mao's power were broken or the Russian party regime were completely transformed. Can two organizations of such different types cooperate peacefully indefinitely? We do not know.

WE HAVE shown how Mao's victory over the agents of Moscow within the party followed from his independent rise to power, and how it necessarily led to his determined, even if not explicit, rejection of the Stalinist type of party. And Mao continued to develop in the same direction. With the outbreak of the Second World War, Chinese Communism's only ties to Moscow, aside from the strength of the common

Leninist tradition, were those of cooperation in foreign policy. These were indeed compelling bonds but they were loose ones.

This new situation is mirrored in a number of pronouncements on party doctrine which have gone completely unnoticed in other countries. World public opinion, its view still fixed on the bitter open debates of the 20's among the leaders of the Russian party, has misunderstood the "new style" which has characterized clashes within the world Communist movement since the beginning of the 30's. Today, there is no longer open polemic; but the slightest differences in wording thereby take on a significance which they could never acquire in a free and open discussion.

Mao Tse-tung had always been reserved in his praise of Stalin. But with the *cheng-feng*, Stalin's name was so completely relegated to the background in Chinese party literature that one may speak of an intentional disparagement of his significance. This situation begins to change a bit with the final conquest of China by the Communists, but a true turning point does not come until the conclusion of the Moscow agreement between China and the Soviet Union in the spring of 1950. From that time on, Stalin's name is to be found in all Chinese party documents. This appears to be a concession made by Mao in response to strong Russian complaints during the negotiations for the treaty.

But our thesis can be pointed up even more sharply. During the 30's in Russia the official doctrine was more and more insistently described as "Leninism-Stalinism." But after the *cheng-feng* Mao developed the rival formulation "Marxism-Leninism and the teachings of Chairman Mao." The absence of Stalin's name speaks louder than any words, and the modestly factual title "Chairman" pointedly contrasts with the growing deification of Stalin elsewhere; but most important, in the Chinese formula Mao now occupies the place held by Stalin in the Russian. This implies a claim to equality at a time when Mao's power did not extend beyond the Yen-an district.

But one need not rely on such inferences in order to demonstrate that a political reality of the first order is here involved. After the unification of China, and in particular during the great campaign centering around the thirtieth anniversary of the party's foundation, this claim is *expressly* raised. Now the formula is: Comrades Lenin and Stalin have shown the way for the modern industrial countries, for which the proletarian revolution is the road to Communism; but for the colonial and semi-colonial countries, who must reach Communism via a bloc of all anti-imperialist classes, the path is that of the Chinese Communist party under Chairman Mao. The Chinese Communist party thus advances its claim to the dominant role in the leadership of the Communist movements of three quarters of the inhabited world.

WE HAVE said that every social order has its own form of expansionism and consequently its own form of conflict. Here we can see the concrete meaning of this assertion. The conflict which indubitably exists between Stalin and Mao Tse-tung derives not from questions of territorial conquest or economic interest; when such matters come up today they are cleared out of the way as expeditiously as 18th- and 19th-century diplomacy cleared away questions relating to the "formal" rank of rulers, over which great wars had been fought in the feudal era. But in the Middle Ages the point of honor, and in the 19th century the national interest, could not be subject to genuine compromises, i.e., compromises willingly accepted and carried out. And thus it is in the totalitarian era with the right to ultimate control of party organizations. The struggles for power of the totalitarian era are struggles for party control. This was shown in the case of Tito, which as a result of lack of experience on both sides was a premature explosion of half-understood forces. The problem presented by Russo-Chinese relations is developing much more slowly, but will inevitably have more far-reaching historical results.

THE best barometer as to relations between Moscow and Peking is to be found in the varying influence of these two command centers on the Communist parties of Asia. Beyond doubt the division of Asia into spheres of influence was one of the principal objects of the Moscow negotiations of two years ago. It was then determined that Mao's most significant sphere of activity was to be India. This is clearly indicated by the otherwise incomprehensible zigzags in the policy of Indian Communism.

When the Chinese Communist troops reached the eastern border of Tibet, the Indian Communist party was under a left extremist leadership set up by Zhdanov, who had in the meantime been overthrown and died. This leadership, like that of Li Li-san's in China in 1930, was wedded to the mad idea of armed uprisings in the great Indian cities. It is odd that Moscow left this leadership at the helm so long, even after Zhdanov's overthrow, and when it was leading Indian Communism from catastrophe to catastrophe. Most likely this indulgence was connected with the bitter enmity of this group of leaders toward Mao, whom in violation of all party etiquette they openly denounced in the official party newspaper as an "opportunist." All this changed overnight after Mao's visit to Moscow. The Indians were forced to send polite telegrams to Peking, which Mao received with icy calm, and a few months later the ultra-left party leadership was removed. It was replaced with another group which, in accordance with Mao's example, shifted to a policy of peasant revolts. Thus in exchange for recognizing Stalin's renown, Mao received power over Indian Communism. He probably thought it a good exchange.

But things did not go quite as he wished. The uprising in Hyderabad could not be maintained. In the spring of 1951—apparently in some not quite clear way in connection with Russo-Chinese tensions in Korea—Moscow used this as the occasion for removing this new Indian leadership and replacing it with a third group, which sought its support in the trade unions of Bombay

and paid much less respect to the Chinese example. But it was only a short interlude. In November Ajoy Ghosh was named secretary-general of the party. Not only were there new expressions of loyalty; party propaganda was now based exclusively on the Chinese model (the bloc of four classes, including the "national bourgeoisie") and on the renown of Mao. As a countermove Moscow had Ana Pauker of Rumania, writing in the Cominform's organ, attack the policy of a bloc with the national bourgeoisie as "opportunism." Thus the struggle for control of Indian Communism continues unabated. No wonder; Moscow and Peking alike are apparently convinced that India is the most important potential center of revolution. Whoever controls Indian Communism will automatically also dominate a Communist India. If this booty falls to Mao, then he is potentially far stronger than Moscow; if it falls to Stalin, then Chinese Communism will have only regional and limited significance.

ALL this may be seen so clearly in Indian developments because the Indian Communist party is to some extent an *enfant terrible* of the world Communist movement. Until recently it was possible in the party to engage in a form of open polemic such as has for decades been impossible in most Communist parties. The situation in the other Asian Communist parties is more obscure because there is less discussion of internal differences.

It is clear that for the time being Mao Tse-tung has taken no steps to build up his influence in Pakistan or further West. Rather he is endeavoring to strengthen his influence in Southeast Asia through the Communist parties of Burma and Malaya, both of which consist almost exclusively of Chinese. But one may not conclude from this that these two parties are simply branches of Peking; the guerilla war of the Malayan Communists is of a rather unpolitical type and shows no signs of being based

on the Chinese experience. The situation in Indo-China is much clearer. Ho Chi Minh and his circle are loyal followers of Moscow, and share the opposition of Tonkinese and Annamese nationalists to any Chinese supremacy. It is worth bearing this fact in mind whenever the possibility of open and direct Chinese intervention in Vietnam is discussed. On the other hand, the situation in the Japanese and—perhaps even more significant—the Korean Communist parties is altogether obscure. Apparently Moscow has resisted Chinese penetration in this area more strongly than in India. Probably the many obscure party crises in Japan and the wishy-washiness of the political formulations used by the Japanese Communists result from an unresolved rivalry between the influences of Stalin and Mao.

These indications should lead us to watch systematically the developments which are taking place inside Asian Communism. Their importance has hitherto not been understood, and their study has in consequence been seriously neglected. But a warning is proper. We generally find in history that the most significant political conflicts, just because of the terrifying scope of their consequences, come only very slowly to the surface. Nothing would be more perilous than to let our recognition of this struggle over party type and party control lead us to expect a sensational eruption between Moscow and Peking in the near future. Only in the most severe sort of world political crisis, and even then only under very special conditions, could such conflicts lead to a sudden break between Moscow and Peking—even aside from the fact that all the talk of a supposed Chinese Titoism can only serve to bind Stalin and Mao even more strongly together. At the moment, the best attitude for the non-Communist world is to acquire an understanding of these tensions and to follow their development, without expecting any plums to fall into our laps. In any case, waiting has often been the most successful policy.